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For immediate release

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Six Outstanding Educators Receive Awards Totaling \$60,000

The Center for Academic Excellence has announced that educators and academic challenge coaches from **Lakes International Language Academy, Mahtomedi, Mankato, Mountain Lake, St. Paul** and **West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area** school districts have been named as the 2011 WEM Outstanding Educator Award honorees and recipients of \$10,000 awards from the WEM Foundation in recognition of their outstanding accomplishments and contributions to student achievement.

Two honorees are named in each of three categories: ***Teacher Achievement Awards***, recognizing exemplary teachers who support, inspire and assist students to attain greater learning as evidenced by student achievement; ***Academic Challenge Coach Awards***, recognizing classroom teachers who are exemplary coaches of student teams that participate and compete in academic challenges endorsed by the Minnesota Academic League Council; and ***Ethics in Education Awards***, recognizing exemplary educators who embody ethical behavior and promote ethical development for students through classroom or school activities, policies or curriculum.

The 2011 WEM Foundation Outstanding Educator Award honorees are:

Teacher Achievement Award:

Ikhlas Abdelkhalig currently teaches first grade at Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School in Eagan where she has been teaching for six years.

Scot Hovan is a Physics teacher at Mahtomedi High School. He has been teaching for 15 years.

Academic Challenge Coach Award:

Thomas D. Appel is an agricultural education instructor at Mountain Lake High School. He is being honored for his work with the Mountain Lake FFA Chapter where he has been the advisor for the past 30 years.

Vergene L. Downs is a gifted and talented specialist at Benjamin E. Mays International Magnet School in St. Paul. She is being honored for her work with FIRST LEGO League and Math Masters.

Ethics in Education Award:

Kristina Lee Kofski is currently a sixth grade teacher at Lakes International Language Academy in Forest Lake. She has been teaching for nine years. She was a regional WEM Ethics in Education honoree in 2010.

Tania K. Lyon teaches Advanced Placement Language and Composition, American Literature and newspaper courses to students in grades 10-12 at Mankato West High School. She has been teaching for 20 years. Tania was a 2010 WEM Ethics in Education regional honoree.

The WEM Outstanding Educator Awards program was created by the WEM Foundation and is administered by the Center for Academic Excellence in partnership with The Minnesota Service Cooperatives (MSC). The WEM Foundation supports teachers and acknowledges their important role in helping all children achieve academically. The awards program, now in its 13th year, has helped recognize education's often "unsung heroes," educators who meet the challenges and opportunities of teaching in a variety of settings.

Educators are nominated for the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards Program by students, parents, colleagues or community members. Those who accept the nomination provide additional information for review and consideration by the Center for Academic Excellence and a blue ribbon selection panel, which reviews and ranks the nominees.

In addition to the six statewide honorees, 10 additional educators have been named as 2011 semi-finalists and each will receive a \$1,000 award.

Academic Challenge Coach Award

Christopher Lenius – *Chaska High School and Chanhassen High School, Eastern Carver County Schools*

Rober Ihrig – *Mankato West High School, Mankato Area Public Schools*

Patrick Hiltner – *Lincoln Junior High School, Glencoe-Silver Lake Public Schools*

Ethics in Education Award

Christine Butler – *Sibley East High School, Sibley East Schools*

Teacher Achievement Award

Eric Koser – *Mankato West High School, Mankato Area Public Schools*

Rick Purrington – *Marshall High School, Marshall Public Schools*

Nora Whalen – *Avalon School, St. Paul*

Alece Henderson – *Noble Academy, Minneapolis*

Ken Ahlberg – *Hermantown Middle School and High School, Hermantown Community Schools*

Zatie Zuehlke – *Bendix Elementary, Annandale Public Schools*

The Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration to advance the development of ethical citizens, providing educational resources, and celebrating achievement and best practices in Minnesota schools, businesses and communities. For more information on CAE or the WEM Outstanding Educator Awards, visit www.mncae.org.